

CORRESPONDENCE

The Birth-rate

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—I lately received a circular announcing an International Population Congress at Cheltenham in August. Before demographers go to any congress they will be well advised to brush up their arithmetic.

In the House of Lords on July 20th, 1938, the Duke of Devonshire said, according to the *Daily Telegraph* :

"They had been advised by experts that for a population to maintain itself stable the birth-rate should be in the neighbourhood of $19\frac{1}{2}$ per thousand."

That figure was repeated by many prominent people, and was lately quoted to me as indubitably true by a leading member of the Royal Commission on Population. Immediately after the Duke made that statement, I wrote a refutation of it to many newspapers, but none of them would publish it.

To talk of *any* birth-rate as the figure required to maintain "a population" is manifestly ridiculous, as there could not be such a figure for all countries unless all countries had the same death-rate.

In 1942 a White Paper (No. 6358) prepared by the Registrars-General for England and Scotland was published, and gave 15.2 as the birth-rate which would maintain the existing population of Great Britain for ever.

A few days ago the Registrar-General for England and Wales issued his *Quarterly Return* No. 396. He tells us that "the births of 1947 were 21 per cent in excess of those required to maintain the population," and he also says that the birth-rate of England and Wales in 1947 was 20.5. On that estimate a birth-rate of 16.9 would maintain the population.

An able mathematician tells me that no figure could have much meaning until we had a stable age-composition, but after that a figure below 15 would probably keep up the existing population for ever.

It is at least certain that a birth-rate of $19\frac{1}{2}$ is far too high, and must inevitably cause either a terrific increase of population or a great rise in the death-rate.

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Marriage and the Church

To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—When criticizing the services of the Church of England Mr. Charlesworth (April 1948, p. 52) must remember that the Book of Common Prayer was compiled in the reign of Edward VI; some of its words and phrases have, like those in the plays of Shakespeare, acquired an altered meaning with the passage of centuries.

The Church has never taught that the acts of begetting and birth are sinful, but, in the words of the Ninth Article of Religion, that "Man . . . is of his own nature inclined to evil. . . . And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated." The Revised Prayer Book (passed by Convocation but rejected by Parliament) underlines this by substituting "prone to sin" for the phrase to which Mr. Charlesworth objects. "Conceived and born of sinners" is probably the best modern interpretation of the sixteenth-century meaning.

Nor does the Church teach the doctrine of hereditary damnation and human worthlessness. Mr. Charlesworth should read the Seventeenth Article, which begins, "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God."

Mr. Charlesworth's "great lawyer" certainly indulges in a fine burst of rhetoric; but on this occasion he seems to be groping in "infinite jungles of error" of his own making.

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To the Editor, Eugenics Review

SIR,—Original sin is the basic dogma of Christianity, and the Roman, Greek and Anglican Churches still practise the superstitious rite of baptism in the belief that it washes away the supposed taint. The Anglican baptism service so horrified me, when I acted as godfather in 1946, that I vowed never to have a child of mine baptized. Since then I have renounced Christianity. So many people believe only what they have been taught to believe, not what they in all sincerity think to be right or true. When "cornered" they often plead mistranslation. But when they find fertile soil for their dogmas they emphasize the sacred accuracy of chapter and verse! Mrs. Hodson finds it necessary to "soft soap" a troublesome dogma. Need I say more?

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